

## Advisory team reined in by ADOT

[By Doug Murphy](#)

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Last week the Arizona Department of Transportation made it clear that the South Mountain Citizens Advisory Team could make all the suggestions it wanted about the South Mountain Loop 202 Freeway, but that the only role the 28-member group has is to vote for or against construction of the freeway.

And even then the team's vote will simply be an advisory one, which will be added to other input and included in the environmental impact statement as the project moves forward.

"What we're looking for is build or no-build (recommendations)," said Tim Tait, a spokesman for ADOT. That recommendation will then be included in the environmental impact statement sent to Washington and needed for final approval.

Tait suggested that CAT can vote whenever it wants and then wouldn't have to continue meeting.

But as for the team having any impact on design of the freeway, next month's agenda made it clear that ADOT isn't interested.

The January lineup includes a discussion on various ways to cut through several important ridges in South Mountain Park, including the use of a tunnel.

The agenda also shows that ADOT's recommended solution to building the 10-lane freeway through the park is to blast a route through the ridges, which is included in a draft environmental impact statement now under study by the federal government.

"So why are they even talking about a tunnel?" asked Laurel Arndt, who represents the Ahwatukee Foothills Village Planning Committee on CAT.

"I have a bad taste about this," said John Rodriguez, who represents the Lakewood Homeowners Association on the team.

"This is my third year and apparently my input doesn't matter," he said Thursday night during a break in the meeting.

The South Mountain Loop 202 at 22 miles is ADOT's largest project. Planning for it has dragged on over six years with CAT making suggestions on ways to update the 1985 design, many of which have been ignored or rejected.

Two years ago the team voted that the Loop 202 should connect with Interstate 10 at the existing Loop 101 and I-10 interchange for efficiency, only to have the recommendation rejected by ADOT director Victor Mendez.

The original freeway plan called for a four-lane freeway from I-10 along where Pecos Road was built, through South Mountain Park to reconnect with I-10 around 55th Avenue.

Over the years, with no funding, the project languished. At one time the city of Phoenix

offered to build Pecos Road around South Mountain as a parkway and at least one consortium proposed a toll road be built on Gila River Indian Community land.

In 2001 ADOT decided to update the plan to take into account the rapid growth in Ahwatukee Foothills and formed the Citizens Advisory Team, which focused for the first five years on the west-side route.

Before the team could consider the east-side route, along Pecos Road through Ahwatukee Foothills, a draft environmental impact statement was sent to the Federal Highway Administration for approval.

Tait said that if approval by the federal government was speedy, construction could begin as early as 2011 with the freeway completed by 2016.

But problems with the draft environmental impact statement have put the approval project on hold.

“I can’t tell you how much longer (approval) will take,” Tait said.

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